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Labor's View of the Church's Function with Regard to Industrial Relations

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LABOR'S view of the Church's function with regard to industrial relations is not only sympathetic at this time, but pleasing, being in direct contrast with the views held by labor on this matter in the not very distant past. In fact, the common opinion among wage-earners was that the Church had not only neglected its duty in regard to industrial relations toward the masses, but that it curried the favor of materialism. Labor has nowhere to look or nowhere to go for common justice other than to the Church, unless it found its efforts upon a materialistic basis and thus control and dominate government and the Church, as capitalism is attempting to do and as the masses have done in Russia. In other words, if labor cannot depend upon the Church for sympathy and a vigorous stand for justice, it will be forced to conquer one blighting form of materialism with another equally inhuman and destructive of men's souls and the finer sensibilities of life.

This condition in government or form of government should never be allowed to prevail, nor will it prevail if Christian doctrine is put into practice in industry. It was materialism that enslaved the laborer. It was the Church that freed him, not by the sword but by the doctrine of human equality, and this is the doctrine that capitalism abhors and would crush if possible. On the other hand, it is upon this doctrine that the laborer relies to uphold his dignity as man and to obtain his just share of the fruits of the earth. It is because the laborer felt, whether rightly or wrongly, that the Church had become lax in

her industrial relations and was allowing materialism to control and oppress her, that he became cold and critical.

Materialism ran rampant from the time of the Middle Ages when capitalism supplanted feudalism and crushed the workingmen's guilds, until 1891 when Pope Leo XIII startled the world with his famous encyclical on the "Conditions of the Working Classes." However, this extraordinary and it would seem inspired elaboration of the doctrine of human equality was allowed to lie dormant. The first real activity in conformity therewith came nearly twenty years later through the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in its investigation and report to the public of the strike of the steel workers at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1910. The Christian forces gradually continuing their activities since that time have inspired the laborers with the hope and confidence that they will not be left defenceless to the gaping maws of capitalism nor forced to become materialists and eventually atheists and drifters with the tide for protection of their rights and liberties. To become materialists would result only in serfdom if their materialistic effort to control and dominate met with success.

THE CHURCH TO TAKE ACTIVE PART

To the laborer's mind the position and attitude of opposing forces in industry makes it plain that the Church can no more separate herself from industrial relations and activities than can the government or the laborer himself be separated therefrom. Nor can the Church maintain a neutral position

as capitalism has pressed her to do, a position to which some of her leaders subscribe. These leaders fail to see that capitalism's method of obtaining control is to first crush the things which give strength to that which it wishes to subjugate. In this instance the object to be controlled is the Church. Hence capitalism strives to crush the wage-earners' unions as it did the workmen's guilds of old because they add to the strength of the Church. The Church's very life is bound up in industrial relations and has been since Christianity dawned upon a pagan world, because the Church involves the salvation of men's souls. Her struggle for two thousand years has been largely against materialism, to prevent one man from making a slave of another or from appropriating the fruits of the earth contrary to the will of God.

The laborer knows there can be no just compromise between the Church and capitalism, that capitalism is as much opposed to Christian doctrine today as materialism was in the early days of Christianity. He also knows that the doctrine of human equality that freed the laborer from slavery is not accepted by capitalism. He sees in the daily press and hears from the rostrum that there is no such thing as human equality, mentally or physically, and for that reason the fittest, the superiors in society, feel justified in appropriating to themselves the lion's share of the fruits of the earth. Thus, they largely control governments and deny natural and lawful rights to their fellow citizens. Christian doctrine, however, tells us there is human equality, not mentally or physically, but human equality wherein each individual in society contributes to the good of all others subordinating private aims and interests to the general welfare.

Therefore, for the Church to remain neutral or inactive in the relations be-

tween capital and labor is to refrain from advocating and carrying out the fundamental principles upon which she was founded. Capitalism's interpretation of human equality is paganism. It would, if allowed to follow to its logical end, recognize a soul and human aspirations only in those who were of the patricians. Consequently, the Church for her own rights and liberties, for her own salvation, must take part in industrial relations, and speak out boldly where she finds injustice.

It is inconceivable how the Church can be neutral while labor is justly pleading for a square deal in industry; while it is discriminated against in the courts where its simple story is not judged in the same way as are the forces whose social standing and general influence are far above that of labor. This discrimination is due to environment, contact, and the possession of great wealth, the latter permitting the employment of superior legal talent to either prosecute or defend justly or unjustly. Neither should the Church, in our opinion, remain quiet or neutral while the capitalistic forces largely control and dominate our political institutions, federal, state and municipal, through which they deny the right of free assembly and free speech.

LABOR MOVEMENT BASED ON CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES

Labor is beginning to realize, however, that the Church has not always been free to denounce political and economic wrong and injustice in the way it should be denounced. It is also beginning to open its eyes to the fact that this political and economic control by capitalism has not only laid almost insurmountable barriers at times in the Church's path of legitimate functioning, but has repeatedly cracked the money whip, if its leaders dared to investigate and tell the truth of labor's

crushed hopes and aspirations. It is these things in common between the Church and the struggling masses, especially the organized wage-earners, that is fast developing a bond of good will, confidence and coöperation.

And why not? The labor movement in our country is built upon Christian principles and practices and it functions accordingly, not, it is true, in the exact spirit of forbearance of the Church itself, because the movement is human in its origin and is compelled to assume militancy in order to keep from being crushed and to gain for the masses that to which they are justly entitled. It is indeed gratifying to the wage-earners that the Christian forces have come to realize and appreciate the Christian character of the trade-union, and to express their stand unhesitatingly as in the declaration against the open shop by the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religions; in the reconstruction program adopted by each of these religious bodies; in the investigation and report of the late steel strike by the Inter-church World Movement; in the joint investigation and report on the Denver tramway strike by the Catholic and Protestant National Councils; and in the general activity in keeping before the public the absolute necessity of a much greater recognition of human rights and welfare in industry than now exists. The Church, through her activities in the field of industrial relations, has shown her true leadership of society and demonstrated the intention of taking her rightful position as the balance wheel of society. The visioned and courageous leaders of the Christian forces see the great change taking place in the social order throughout the world, and sense the necessity of moulding it into such form as to prevent a debacle of society and complete chaos. In their efforts it would seem that the employers of labor should coöperate

gladly with them, for success means continuance of the system of private ownership of productive property, and failure means its abolition.

CHURCH TO PROMOTE JUSTICE

Throughout the world there is constant unrest of a character never before witnessed or recorded. This is due largely to the rapid means of communication and transportation, and to the doctrine of self-determination for all peoples which has impregnated the world, the latter a democratic germ for industry as well as for government. These things, coupled with progress in education and higher standards, demand a change in the social order. This change is now in process and will necessarily continue regardless of any and all obstacles that may be put in the way. The conclusion to be reached, therefore, is that it is far better to go along with and mould this change into sound, stable government based upon good will and justice, than to oppose it and bring into being government based upon injustice and hate.

Employers of labor, however, will not openly and fairly coöperate with the Christian forces in their industrial activities because capitalism will not permit them to do so. Christian forces are striving for a square deal in industry and government; capitalism is opposed to the square deal. In fact, it functions through deception, misrepresentation and oppression. It is blind to human appeal and calloused to the hopes and aspirations of the masses. But materialism has ever been thus. We find that in 133 B.C. a Roman tribune, in promulgating his agrarian laws, appealed to the rich to accept the trifling sacrifice for the good of the republic, but neither appeal, argument or eloquence could overcome their narrow selfishness. There is too much blind dependence today upon the soundness

and sanity of the American wage-earner. The thought of human limitation is entirely cast aside by the capitalistic forces. The people of this day have passed beyond the stages of slavery and serfdom in the slow process of civilization. A living and a place to sleep will not satisfy the human being today who can read and write and who at least exercises freedom of thought and a limited freedom of action.

This is set forth clearly and unequivocally in the Catholic Bishops' Program of Reconstruction wherein it says: "Nevertheless the full possibilities of increased production will not be realized so long as the majority of the workers remain mere wage-earners. The majority must somehow become owners, or owners in part, of the instruments of production. They can be enabled to reach this stage gradually through coöperative productive societies and co-partnership arrangement. In the former the workers own and manage the industry themselves; in the latter they own a substantial part of the corporate stock and exercise a reasonable share in management. However slow the attainment of these ends, they will have to be reached before we can have a thorough, efficient system of production, or an industrial and social order that will be secure from the danger of revolution."

Capitalism as a matter of course repudiates this sound and evolutionary doctrine as it repudiates all effort and action that tend to curb its power or curtail its satisfaction and greed. This is borne out by an editorial that

appeared some time ago in the *Wall Street Journal* and is particularly significant on this point. It says: "When the real adjustment comes the unskilled worker finishes where he belongs, at the bottom of the list. He will be able to live on two dollars a day when he is lucky enough to get that amount regularly. The cost of living will adjust itself. The Labor Bureau will give up publishing nonsense about \$2,600 a year minimum for a fancied family of five. The unskilled worker will thank goodness that he has no family of five or indeed anybody but himself to support; nor will any employer pay him on a basis of such fatherhood as the bankrupt and discredited Interchurch World Movement absurdly proposed in its gratuitous inquiry into the steel strike."

Here we come to a stern realization of the absolute necessity of activity in the field of industrial relations on the part of the Church: first, for the salvation of society through maintaining the principles and practices of Christianity therein; second, for the purpose of moulding the inevitable change in the functioning of industry in a manner that will accord justice to all; third, to preserve the present system of private productive property. While the writer is not in a position nor authorized to speak for labor as a whole, it is safe to say that the interpretation herein set forth of labor's view of the Church's function with regard to industrial relations is in conformity with the position and principles of the labor movement of our country.